

The Heart of Singing

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Playfulness in Singing

The intent of play, the attitude of play, can undergird much of what we teach, and we need not be "playing a game" in order to be playful about what we are learning and teaching.

"Play is a pleasurable activity that has no clear-cut goal and is free of anxiety; it's done for its own sake." "Work is not the opposite of play, depression is." (Brown)

Play creates a setting where "we are all in this together," a collaborative effort, a community of learner-singers.

Playfulness gives voice to many learners, not just those who raise their hands.

Playfulness structures freedom in ways that allow the song and activity to guide both freedom and structure.

Playfulness centers around choice-making for students. Being invited to make choices and seeing those choices in action is very powerful to young children.

Playfulness offers serendipitous opportunities for surprise, humor, and mistakes.

With playfulness, problem-making and problem-solving become habits of mind.

Through playfulness, imaginations are cultivated.

With a playful habit of mind, teachertalk focuses on observational feedback, neutralizing criticisms and compliments.

"Folksongs provide the context through which children learn to respond to each other, give and receive attention, focus listening, make and acknowledge invitations, describe ideas and actions, and imagine meanings and solutions. Purposefully nurturing and nonthreatening, the song context structures freedom and builds confidence for singing, playing, interacting, and studying." (Bennett, 1999, p. 3)



Connecting through Singing

Singing connects us; it hooks us up like the gears of a clock.

Singers become meaning-makers. Through story-making, songs come alive for children; their personal imprint is left on the song.

Singing is communication with the same biological ontogeny as speech (Welch, 2005). All emotions are expressed vocally (Titze 1994) and they are accompanied with "strong acoustic variation" (Scherer 1995).

Well-modulated speaking of nursery rhymes, combined with dramatizing the variety of emotions embedded within them, provide fertile contexts for vocal communication, vocal connecting.

Research by Welch (1979), Davidson (1994), and Hargreaves (1996) indicates that melodic contour of a song is generally easier for children to match than the specific pitches, and words of a song are more frequently accurate than the melodic contour. Well-modulated speaking of nursery rhymes is akin to "cross-training" for vocal skills.

Singing prompts listening: to other children, to sounds present, and to sounds in inner hearing,

"There is no such thing as a wrong note, as long as someone is singing it." Pete Seeger

Singers (students) have value, whether or not they measure up to our musical (academic) expectations of them.

Life with Singing

What would change for our quality of life if everyone felt safe enough and free enough to sing "at the drop of a hat?"

Singing requires no equipment or materials; it is organic and primal. We can take it with us wherever we go.

For singing to be blissfully portable, songs we sing with children must be ones that they want to sing outside our classrooms.

Singing puts music in us. We are the sound source. When we sing, we become the music.

Values of Singing

1. Singing connects us to others, yet may be accomplished alone.
2. Singing is a pathway for internalizing musical sound.
3. Singing cultivates feelings of empathy, confidence, kinship, and civic pride.
4. Singing provides a context for thinking.
5. Singing frames, motivates, and emphasizes the sounds and meanings of language.
6. Singing suggests and coordinates movement.
7. Singing prompts listening.
8. Singing causes us to breathe more deeply and more purposefully.
9. Singing exercises muscles for speech and song.
10. Singing offers a bridge to move from the known to the unknown in music discovery.
11. Singing gives flow, shape, and nuance to a series of individual notes.
12. Singing offers a means for multitask listening and skill development.
13. Singing gives us freedom to perform music without reading it.
14. Singing infuses spirit into instrumental performances.
15. Singing adds expressivity to reading music notation.
16. Singing elicits meaning-making.
17. Singing may be done inside our heads, with no one listening but us.
18. Singing is a right of everyone.
19. Singing is a pathway for externalizing musical sound and emotions.
20. Singing puts music in us. We are the sound source. When we sing, we become the music.

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